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SUBJECT: MEPI UPDATE FOR MOROCCO

REF: A) Rabat 0399, B) Rabat 2509

11. Summary: This cable highlights MEPI programs and initiatives in Morocco from July 1-September 30. Activities included a project officer training session at post, a monitoring visit by staff from MEPI's Regional Office in Tunis, a training seminar for MEPI Program Officers in Tunis and two new small grants. Highlights from existing programs included preparations for the 2007 legislative elections, International Republican Institute (IRI) activities, literacy training, promoting education among rural girls, judicial reform, Global Rights' Court Accompaniment Programs, Arab Civitas' Project Citizen, Financial Services Volunteer Corps (FSVC) projects and Free Trade Agreement activities. Implementers are partnering with local NGOs at the grassroots level to support numerous programs committed to reform in the four MEPI pillars. End summary.

MEPI TRAINING

12. In September, representatives from MEPI's Tunis Regional Office traveled to Rabat to conduct training sessions on MEPI project officer responsibilities to 26 mission members. The training sessions covered MEPI basics, small grants programming; administration; monitoring and evaluation; public diplomacy as well as responsibilities described in the small grants' "Letter of Delegation of Authority". Trainers and emboffs also discussed ways to improve coordination efforts in MEPI programs. Rabat was the first post to receive such training.

13. Post's MEPI Coordinator and MEPI Program Assistant attended a MEPI Training Seminar in Tunis from September 17-19. Emboffs and FSNs with primary responsibilities for MEPI from Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Lebanon also attended. The training sessions covered similar subjects as those listed above, but with an emphasis on feedback from the field.

MEPI VISITORS

14. MEPI's Tunis Regional Office sent three members to Morocco on September 21-27 to conduct monitoring site visits. They were joined by post's MEPI program assistant for a trip to Ouarzazate to visit MEPI grantees Near East Foundation and Association of Development of the DRA Valley (ADEDRA) in Zagora. In Rabat, they also met individually with MTDS-Tanmia, Demos Consulting and Joussour.

TWO NEW MEPI SMALL GRANTS

¶15. In September, post awarded two new MEPI small grants to NGOs totaling \$53,220, both pertained to the women's pillar. The first recipient, ADEDRA seeks to increase the organizational capacities of women's associations. The second, Association Tallasemtane for Environment and Development (ATED), promotes the rule of law through educating women and children about their rights.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE 2007 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

¶16. In an effort to prepare for the 2007 legislative elections, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) organized two conferences on the organization of national campaigns and electoral platform development. The most notable result of NDI's efforts this period was the creation of the first-ever national campaign management teams by four political parties: the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), the Rally of National Independents (RNI), the Popular Movement (MP), and the Party of Progress and Socialism-Al Ahd Party (PPS-Al Ahd Alliance). This rapid response from the political parties should result in more comprehensive and organized campaigns by parties. NDI also sponsored a two-day workshop covering economic policies and the creation of a research think-tank.

IRI's ACTIVITIES

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¶17. In July, IRI held a conference on the new family code and its impact on the participation of Moroccan women in public and political life. Prominent lawyer and member of the King's consultative board, Zhor El Horr, summarized the legal modifications and their intended impact on Moroccan women. El Horr was involved in writing the new family code, and continues to work on its implementation as a judge. Amongst the other speakers, one discussed cultural and legal obstacles in implementing the new code, and opened the floor for continued debate. The conference received wide media attention

¶18. In September, IRI's Women's Leadership Coalition program provided training on public speaking and campaign planning strategies for the 2007 elections. Women from six political parties participated. Moroccan state television aired a short report on IRI and its involvement in women's political affairs.

LITERACY TRAINING

¶19. The Advancing Learning and Employability for a Better Future (ALEF) project launched its pre-literacy strategy to teach reading and writing of classical Arabic through the Moroccan dialect and the Berber language. The pre-literacy program also uses the family code as training content and targets women. During this period USAID/ALEF also recruited a second round of grantee associations to implement its literacy program this school year. These associations will target 4,000-6,000 additional beneficiaries. In addition, through ALEF support, Anis Birrou, State Secretary for Literacy and Non-Formal Education, represented Morocco during First Lady Laura Bush's conference on global literacy held in New York in September. The meeting was an opportunity to attract attention on the efforts of the GOM to combat illiteracy.

PROMOTING EDUCATION AMONG RURAL GIRLS

¶10. USAID's MEPI contribution to the Committee for Promoting

Education Among Rural Girls (CSSF) Scholarship for Success program continues to successfully build dormitories that provide housing for rural high school-aged girls who otherwise would not be able to continue their education. Two new dormitories were created through funds from the Motorola Corporation and AMCHAM. To date, twelve local partner associations have demonstrated their sustainability and "graduated" from financial support through the CSSF, by collecting funds directly from other partners and even the girls' parents. It was determined that despite challenges at the schools that the girls attended (lack of teachers, teacher absenteeism, and over-crowded classrooms), the average academic performance of the girls for grade nine exceeded the national average by ten percent.

JUDICIAL REFORM

¶11. MEPI-funded Moroccan association Adala "Justice," established with the support of the American Bar Association (ABA) and dedicated to promoting judicial independence, convened a national symposium on July 21-22 in Rabat on the implementation of the recommendations of the Moroccan Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER). The IER's final report included a number of important recommendations concerning needed constitutional, institutional, and judicial reforms, including the need for greater judicial independence, which were submitted to and endorsed by the king in late 2005. Substantive sessions during the symposium addressed how lobby the GOM to implement the IER's judicial reform recommendations. The participants stressed the importance of the independence of the judiciary for democratic transition and emphasized the involvement of NGOs, media and public in implementing these recommendations.

¶12. In addition Adala printed and began distributing the recommendations of its earlier judicial independence conference. The 167-page booklet entitled "Judicial Independence in Morocco in the Light of International Standards and the Mediterranean Basin Experience" is printed in both Arabic and French, and is being distributed to judges, judicial leaders and judicial independence activists throughout Morocco. The booklet forms one of Adala's growing advocacy and outreach tools to support greater judicial independence in the country.

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GLOBAL RIGHTS COURT ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAMS

¶13. Global Rights worked with eight NGOs in rural and underserved areas to create effective permanent structures for Court Accompaniment Programs. Under these programs, volunteer Court Advocates provide legal advice to women in their communities, accompany women to court, and ensure application of the laws through monitoring and documenting of judicial decisions. A workshop in July launched the Global Rights' Ensuring Access to Justice through Court Accompaniment Program. Representatives of the eight NGOs assessed current court accompaniment activities, the needs of women in their communities, technical assistance needs, priorities for training and implementation plans.

¶14. Global Rights also created the National Young Women's Activist Network to mobilize the next generation of women's human rights activists. They held a workshop to analyze previous networking initiatives among NGOs in Morocco, identify technical assistance needs and priorities for expert assistance and training, and elaborate plans for future program implementation.

ARAB CIVITAS' PROJECT CITIZEN

¶15. In June, Arab Civitas' Project Citizen which seeks to enhance the quality of education and strengthen democratic processes by fostering public awareness and acceptance of civic rights and responsibilities, held a national conference to showcase the students' projects. Attendees of the conference included the

Governor of Casablanca, Ministry of Education officials, NGOs and civil society leaders, city council members, Parliamentarians, educators, business leaders and parents' associations and it was reported on TV, radio and newspapers. In a second Project Citizen activity, 24 recent graduates of Moroccan teacher-training institutes received civics training to share with their students. A special session featured the Deputy Minister of Education in Benslimane and the Director of the Regional Academy in Casablanca who stressed the importance of integrating civic education in Moroccan schools and the positive impact of implementing Project Citizen.

FSVC PROJECTS

¶16. Between June and September, FSVC implemented three projects in Morocco. First, in the Developing Equity Financing Sources for Moroccan SMEs program, FSVC volunteers consulted with the Moroccan private equity association, Association Marocaine des Investisseurs en Capital (AMIC), and two Moroccan investment companies on fund and portfolio management strategies to improve small firm portfolio performance. The consultations built on past FSVC collaboration with AMIC and fund managers to improve capacity of this emerging new source of financing for growth and export oriented Moroccan SMEs. Second, in the Bolstering Morocco's Central Bank's (BAM) New Accounting Regime program, FSVC continued support of BAM's reform agenda with a seminar highlighting the Supervision Department's work on transitioning Morocco to international accounting standards. Finally, FSVC's program Supporting Basel II Implementation consulted with BAM staff on their application of the Basel II capital adequacy accord and market risk issues faced by commercial banks. FSVC organized a one day round table for BAM and the Moroccan banks' working group on market risk issues, and the global application of Basel II.

FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

¶17. The International Executive Service Corps, through its Morocco Fast Track Trade (MFTT) Program, arranged several meetings for MFTT clients with American firms during the Fancy Food Show New York in July. Several orders are under negotiation as a result. Whole Foods has already finalized an initial order for argan oil. As a consequence of continuing feedback, Dari Couscous has completed a new packaging design to fulfill U.S. market needs, particularly those of Whole Foods.

¶18. A detailed description of MEPI programs in Morocco can be found on the Mission unclassified Internet web page at www.usembassy.ma.

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